

Abstract

Methods and structure for enabling secure communications between a customer computer system and a vendor support representative computer system despite firewall security on either or both systems. The invention provides for a collaboration center with a rendezvous service and an interaction service responsive to communications from the support representative or the customer. The rendezvous service initiates the communications between the customer and an appropriate support representative selected according to rendezvous rules provided by the vendor. Once selected, the support representative and customer systems interact by exchanging requests and responses through the interaction service using standard HTTP and Web protocols and interfaces. The communications utilize standard Web browser client programs on the respective computers and standard Web HTTP protocols that pass through typical firewall protection. The customer location includes a support proxy module that receives requests to load and execute vendor supplied operation modules for purposes of detailed technical interactions with the customer's computer system. The loaded operation modules enable the support representative to perform detailed technical inquiries and operations on the customer's computer system. The support proxy module verifies the loaded operation modules using digital signature techniques to assure the customer of the integrity of communications. The customer then relies on the reputation of the vendor to ensure security of the customer's system.